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ABSTRACT

Using electronic mail (E-mail), the instructor of a master's level drama class at a Finnish university and an introductory literature instructor at Indiana University-Perdue University at Indianapolis communicated between themselves and served as intermediaries for communication between two groups of their students. While instructional levels and language requirements differed, the two classes read the same plays. Students in both classes enjoyed the experience and supported its continuation. The fact that each group had in the other a real audience helped the student writers understand what to include in their stories; students wrote on both literary and personal topics. The cross-cultural exchanges helped students explore what was universal and what was culturally bound in literary interpretation. Future efforts in this area would be improved by direct communication between students, and the American students called for more similar writing assignments than the two groups in the study were assigned. (An appendix contains excerpts from the E-mail exchanges.) (SG)

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Cross-Cultural Team Teaching: E-mail for Literary Analysis

In Spring Semester 1989, an introductory literature class at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) studied drama in conjunction with a masters' level class at the University of Tampere in Finland. Electronic mail made possible the planning, coordination and exchange between the two classes and the two instructors: Professor Aarre Heino and Professor Helen Schwartz. This collaboration, between two teachers who were not to meet face-to-face until three months into the semester, put into practice a number of theoretical assumptions emerging in composition theory and literary analysis:

1. Having a real audience and authentic purpose helps students understand and meet audience needs better than in the situation of students writing solely to the teacher as expert.

2. Interpreting literature is a constructive act, not simply a decoding of meaning. During this constructive act, the reader interacts with the text to create a meaning that is based in individual and cultural experience, so that different people will have varying interpretations, as will people from

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different cultures. During this constructive act, the text exerts constraints on the reader so that universal constants in literary response are also possibilities.

This paper will report on the inception and goals of the course, the implementation of cross-cultural exchange via Bitnet, and an analysis of the problems and achievements resulting.

How We Began

In Fall 1988, two instructors in widely disparate locations met each other on electronic mail, introduced by a mutual colleague because of their known interests in both literature and computer applications in the humanities. Professor Helen Schwartz, newly located at IUPUI in the English Department, was scheduled to speak at a conference on computers in writing in Sweden. Her computer-loving colleague, Giles Hoyt in the German Department, learned that his friend and host in Finland, Aarre Heino of the University of Tampere, was also planning to attend the meeting, and Hoyt "introduced" the two via electronic mail, with Professor Heino writing in English and Professor Schwartz responding at first in rusty German (excerpt 1 in Appendix).

In addition to their shared computer-mania, both professors were interested in research on the differences in literary interpretation--with Schwartz studying variations among individual readers and Heino interested in differences between cultures as well systems for distance learning and life-long education.

Therefore both were eager to attempt intercontinental team-teaching, despite important differences and difficulties. Both realized the adventurous nature of the attempt, with Heino commenting, "You must be a brave lady (eine tapfere Frau): starting co-operation with a totally unknown man from the periphery of the world must be like jumping in the dark. I myself have always liked adventures in my teaching [excerpt 2]." Schwartz acknowledged:

> Yes, I am very tapfere. That is a nice way to say "foolhardy," nicht? . . . I think I understand how a blind person must feel. You talk and reach out and MEET, but I have no idea how old you are or what you look like. Giles tells me that you are very distinguished indeed, and if we met at MLA I would probably not dream of suggesting this exciting exchange between our students. So I am glad for the courage I find using bitnet. (excerpt 3)

The time was short, with only two months to plan before the beginning of the Spring 1989 Semester in Indiana, and there were important questions to answer and differences to deal with creatively.

Different levels: The students were at different levels of preparation, with the American students enrolled in English L206, Introduction to Drama and the Finnish students enrolled in a masters-level course, preparing to write a long masters thesis.

Differing language requirements: The American students did all their writing and all of their reading in English. Finnish students, who were comparative literature majors, not English majors, wrote in English and read in English, Swedish and Finnish.

Shared syllabi: The writing requirements were very different for the two classes, with American students writing many journal entries and several short essays whereas Finnish students tended to write medium-length formal essays, that sometimes included responses to American comments. However, the reading list was shared, chosen mainly on the basis of the book order already submitted by Schwartz, but with the addition of a Finnish play, Snow in May. Another Finnish play, Jarner's Eva Maria, was read optionally by American students and by all the Finnish students. Schwartz unwittingly made the Finnish students' task even more difficult because she was unaware that Jarner's play was in Swedish (one of Finland's two official languages), even though Tampere is in a region in which people's native tongue is the linguistically-unrelated Finnish language.

Different computer access: Neither the American nor the Finnish students had direct access to Bitnet, so both the teachers had to be the technicians who sent, received and distributed student texts. The five Finnish students created their own texts using word processing, but Schwartz had to re-type student essays from the 26 students in her class, sometimes "editing" by omitting

passages, but otherwise letting students speak in their own voices. And because students turned in journals on a rotating schedule, some student journals had not been turned in by the time the student texts had to be transmitted. Student participation was broad for Miller's Death of a Salesman and the Finnish play, Manner's Snow in May, but thereafter, American students participated on a volunteer basis with essays on Antigone, The Misanthrope and the Finnish play (in Swedish), Jarner's Eva Maria.

Results

Although many problems limited the scope of achievement, intercontinental team-teaching produced evidence that the potential both teachers saw could in fact be realized--even more fully with more advance planning and improved computer facilities.

Students in both classes enjoyed the exchange and expressed strong support for continued inclusion in courses. In their autobiographical statements, many included their addresses and phone numbers. On a questionnaire, American students rated the exchange and the journal entries which provided texts for the exchange as the most worthwhile activities in the class.

Short autobiographies showed clear differences in the two student populations. American students represented a wider range of ages (from 19 to 41, as opposed to Finnish students from 21 to 31). Almost all the American students worked many hours per week, unlike the full-time Finnish students

whose tuition and expenses were paid by the government for about 6 years. Americans represented a more ethnically and socially diverse group (single and married, with and without children)--as excerpts from the autobiographies show (excerpts 4-5 in Appendix). (Note: American students are cited by name only when they have given specific permission.) However, Finnish students showed the greater sophistication one would expect of advanced students.

Student texts showed evidence that the first hypothesis underlying our experiment was valid: a real audience helped writers understand what to include. For example, Minna-Kristiina Linkala included responses from American students along with documented sources in her essay on Snow in May (see excerpt #6). And Finnish students writing on the place of Swedish literature in Finland and reporting an interview with author V. V. Jarner had a real audience, whereas these topics might seem simply academic if the students had not been in the rhetorical situation of interpreting their culture to a foreign audience.

American students included information about themselves to explain how they were "locating" themselves in their responses to the American play, Death of a Salesman; they did so to an extent not usually seen, even in journal entries. For example, Mark Gibson included his own experience as a fast-food clerk and aspiring creative writer as a contrast to Willy Loman's search for upward mobility (excerpt 7), but another student moves from her response to Willy toward an assessment of her own father:

> I think I can understand how Mr. Loman feels. My father, who is self employed, often feels that we kids MAY not respect him as much because he was so busy working trying to raise a family of 7 and meeting the demands of his customers. In reality, he is an extraordinary father who has given so much to his family.

I believe the presence of a non-American audience made these students see the relevance of their experience, value it and include it, to an extent that the assignment to speak from their own values does not normally elicit.

Student texts also supported the idea that cross-cultural exchange would help students explore what was universal and what was culturally-bound in literary interpretation. Students commented on the national characteristics evident in their literature while also arguing, by the very act of interpretation, that interpretive communities could be established through literary analysis. For example, Kirk Smith consciously brought in ideas from his American Studies course:

> On p. 520 we are given Willy's "key" by Hap when he says, "Dad is never so happy as when he's looking forward to something." We as Americans are taught to never be content. We always have to strive for better, always on the go. It's much like the JFK administration from my American Studies class in that they were always "doing something," always on the go, but never

> accomplishing anything. I find that I am very much like that. We could say that was why Biff turned out to be a vagabond. Biff wanted very much to be successful, but in his own terms.

And Finnish student Minna-Kristiina Linkala, delineated cultural differences between American and Finnish life style and society in her essay on Snow in May: "a typical Finnish character differs from American one quite a lot. It is well known, that Finnish people (in general) are introvert, shy, melancholy and they can control their feelings very well. The Finns also love to deliberate different questions. In spite of Americans (as far as I know them!) are open, noisy, always smiling." (The stereotype seems to have occasioned one American student's irony in his later autobiographical statement: "I am not always loud nor do I always smile, which is a common stereotype about Americans.") American students also showed awareness that cultural differences should be considered when interpreting a play. For example, David Black, a 37-year old creative writing major, asked about Finnish perceptions of juvenile delinquency in relation to Eva Maria, perhaps because of his full-time job as a deputy bail commissioner at the county jail, setting conditions of pre-trial release for defendants in criminal cases:

> The scenes involving the gang make me wonder if you have the same perception of and problems with juvenile delinquency that we do in the United States. In the US their behavior might be construed by some people as delinquent and by others just normal

youthful behavior. How do you view it?

A number of problems, however, limited the effectiveness of this exchange. There were technical problems (lost files, problems with uploading and downloading), but they were remarkably unimportant. More important was the need, realized from experience, for much more careful planning and timing of exchanges. The problems occurred, in part, because the teachers were the conduits and technicians. If students had direct access to a Bitnet electronic conference, they could load their texts themselves and also read whenever they could get access, rather than relying on teachers finding time to send out files and get printouts of incoming files. Thus, for example, Paula Korhonen's invitation for exchange about Chaim Potok's work or Johanna Javanainen's query whether any of the Americans played the flute (in excerpt 4) remained unanswered. Although some question-answering was possible, other more sensitive exchanges (such as the American student's dig against stereotypes) were probably inhibited by the indirectness of exchange among students. In addition, students sometimes found the names confusing (with Ms. Linkala assuming Kari Scott was male, as shown in excerpt 6). An early exchange of captioned photographs would probably be advisable.

Even with greater student responsibility for creating, sending and reading texts, however, the timely scheduling of discussions needed to be more finely tuned, allowing for some delays, even though electronic mail had much faster turnaround time than airmail. As a concrete example, David Black's questions

about cultural differences were finished on February 4, but formal essays on Jarner's reputation, cultural background and interpretation were already drafted and arrived, with only indirect response to Black's questions, within the week. And Finnish essays on The Misanthrope arrived after we had already finished discussing the play in Indianapolis.

American students felt that the difference in genre (informal journal entries versus formal essays) made them uncomfortable, although they did not seem to mind the difference in the level of sophistication between the two groups. The Indiana students, who said the journal entries were their favorite activity in the class, even volunteered to write formal essays, but then decided that a better strategy would entail using a software program, SEEN (written by Schwartz and used in the class), that would elicit responses to the literature and store it as electronically transmittable (ASCII) textfiles.

Professor Heino confirmed the benefits of more direct student access, embedded in an educational philosophy that encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and to set the terms and needs of collaboration. For future collaborations, he envisioned students having direct access to Bitnet: "[Finnish students could then] discuss directly with your students. And perhaps without papers only via terminals from (Finnish) heart to (American) heart." Instructors could set topics beforehand for their groups, with SEEN or a list of relevant questions.

> The size of the group could be from 10-15 but if there are more, then two or three could make a working team to contact your students. . . . My group here could come together perhaps every second week to tell each other what kind of discussions are going on in BITNET. In between my students could go freely to the terminals and send their greetings and opinions to students in your group. And I would minimalize my role. I would like to be some kind of 'Geist der Erzaehlung', I would be there when needed and keep the process going on. (Excerpt 8)

Although both instructors were interested in following up on this initial experience, further collaboration has been limited by the difficulties of coordination and the new roles engaging our interest--including election of Professor Heino as Vice Rector of his university. It is my hope that further collaboration between IUPUI and the University of Tampere can be arranged, built not only on the experience of this class, but the warm personal relationship that developed between the faculty not only by electronic mail but during a visit of Professor Schwartz to Finland in April 1989.

In addition, it is my hope that publication of our experience will elicit requests for further experiences with distance learning. The exchange between literature classes fulfills one important prerequisite for distance learning situations: the two groups must share a goal which cannot be reached without the participation of both. Our initial experience showed that electronic mail not

only makes international exchange feasible to schedule and affordable, but also provides for students direct experience by which to judge for themselves important theoretical questions in literary theory today: the extent of the universal and culturally-related aspects of literary interpretation.

APPENDIX: Excerpts from E-Mail Exchange

Excerpt 1:
Date: Tue, 1 Nov 1988 15:13 EST
From: Helen Schwartz <IBGL100@INDYCMS>
Subject: greetings
To: <AOHEINO@FINFUN>

My colleague Giles Hoyt gave me your name and bitnet address. Nun ich schreibe auf deutsch, aber ich habe nicht auf deutsch geschreibt vor viele Jahre. So, verzeihen sie wenn ich schreibe schrecklich. . . .
P.S. Sind Sie interessiert zu schreiben via bitnet von Ihre Studenten zu Meine Studenten? Vielleicht die differences in cultural perspectives sind sehr interresant, nicht?

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Excerpt 2:
Date: Thu, 8 Dec 88 08:09 O
From: <AOHEINO@FINFUN>
Subject: Co-operation
To: ibgl100@indycms
Dear Professor Schwartz,

. . . By the way, you must be a brave lady (eine tapfere Frau): starting co-operation with a totally unknown man from the periphery of the world must be like jumping in the dark. I myself have always liked adventures in my teaching.

We must be quite creative in our work, because anything any time can go wrong. Twice before I had some troubles in transmitting files. . . . And finally, everything in this business falls on me. My students scarcely can write their texts with computers. Printing them as text files and sending them then via BITNET to Indiana must sound quite mysterious - and I hope exciting - in their ears.

In the next letters we have to find suitable books for the groups.

Best wishes to you and to your students and if Giles moves somewhere around, please say hello to him, too.
Your Aarre Heino

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Excerpt 3:
Date: Sat, 10 Dec 1988 12:34 EST
From: Helen Schwartz <IBGL100@INDYCMS>
Subject: Re: Co-operation
To: <AOHEINO@FINFUN>
In-Reply-To: Your message of Thu 8 Dec 88 08:09 O

. . . Yes, I am very tapfere. That is a nice way to say "foolhardy," nicht? When I have used computer conferences, there I met many strange (that is, formerly unknown) men and women. I think I understand how a blind person

must feel. You talk and reach out and MEET, but I have no idea how old you are or what you look like. Giles tells me that you are very distinguished indeed, and if we met at MLA I would probably not dream of suggesting this exciting exchange between our students. So I am glad for the courage I find using bitnet. . . .
How fortunate that we are both flexible as well as tapferen. Helen Schwartz

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Excerpt 4 (selections from Finnish students' self-introductions, sent Jan. 23, 1989

Dear fellow students in Indiana,
I'd like to introduce myself first of all, just to get started in this exciting opportunity to work with you. My name is Paula Korhonen, and as you can guess I'm of the female kind. I'm 28 years old, and I've been studying for ages at the University of Tampere. (In Finland it is very common and possible to keep on stydying for a degree, because the tution is free, you only have to pay for living etc.) My major is English philology i.e. English language and literature plus some knowledge of history and social institutions. . . . I'm writing my final study (about 100 pages) on American literature, on Chaim Potok and the world he describes i.e. Hassidic Orthodox Jews and cultural confrontations, or something like that. Anyone interested to give useful information and comments? It will be rather sociological. . . . During this seminar I'm going to write an essay on Finland's Swedish language literature: its role and significance. . . .

Hello my unknown American friends,
My name is Juha-Pekka Laakso. I am 31- years- old and a male. To Tampere University I came in 1983, so I was a very old boy [26?] (?) when I started my studies. The main subject of mine is Drama or Drama literature, if I can say so. I am interested of Sosiology and Semiotics, too. . . . I'll write someting with methods of Sociology or Semiotics in this project. I think something like ralationships between characters in a play (like Eva Maria, Antigone, Snow in May). My english is not very good but I really hope understand what I'll write to you.

Dear Friends at the University of Indiana
My name is Minna-Kristiina Linkala, I am an 23 years old girl and I am studying [comparative literature] at the university of Tampere. . . . My other subjects are journalism (or mass communication) , sociology and art history. I would like to mention especially sociology, because this subject helps me to analyse literature.
Last winter I studied at the university of Hamburg in the Federal Republic of Germany learning somer German, but it has as such not much to do with my studies.
My profession in the future is an editor. . .
In this seminar I am going to write about the themes of "Eva Maria" and about their relationships to the society.

Excerpt 5:
IUPUI students respond in April 1989:
Student #1: I am 21 years old, a senior at IUPUI studying Secondary Education in English. I enjoy music and reading and look forward to graduating in a year. I am not always loud nor do I always smile, which is a common stereotype about Americans [responding to an impression of a Finnish student; see excerpt #6].

Mark Alan Gibson: I am a 26-year-old creative writing major attempting to get an education while working 66 hours a week. I work at a local Pizza Hut and a Video Store. I am an avid reader--anything from comics to classics. I am also a film buff. I've been married for 5 years (although I don't see my wife too often).

My name is Rachel Holdeman. On my next birthday I will be 23 years old. I have one more year of college left before I graduate. I am working on a bachelor's of science degree in biology. I am primarily interested in work in animal behavior--work like Jane Goodall does with chimpanzees in Africa. I am enrolled in this class because I like to read plays. . . .

Student #2: Paivai My name is [omitted] and I am a Finnish-American. (My ancestors came over from Finland.) My major is English Education, and I am currently finishing my first year of college. I hope someday to visit Finland when I'm through with college. Nekke Mein (probably not spelled right. I can speak a little Finnish, but not write it!)

My name is Lorna McIntyre. I am majoring in Secondary Education - English. I'm married and have a five-year-old son. I have about 2 years left in school until I finish my degree. I work part-time in a clinic laboratory as a medical laboratory technican, and I attend school full-time.

Student #3: I am a sophomore at IUPUI, majoring in Elementary Education. IUPUI is a commuter college for most of its students. Most of the people who go to school here are working their way through college. The average age of the students in our classroom is probably 25-27 years old. (I am 19 years old.) I am taking 15 credit hours and work about 30 hours per week. . . .

Kittie Tollefson: I am the oldest student in this class, a senior Education major (my last year), and 41 years old. I will be doing my student teaching next January. I am married and have 4 step-children (3 step sons) and my husband and I have 3 sons from our marriage. My youngest step-son is in his first year of college at Indiana University. Over the years I have worked for a company that owns eight mortuaries. My life style and position (where I work and being a parent) have brought a different image to some of these plays. By the way, my husband's full name is Theodore IVER TOLLEFSON (Norwegian). Ted's grandmother was a "mail-order bride" from Norway.

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Excerpt 6 (Mar. 7, 1989):
Minna-Kristiina Linkala

"SNOW IN MAY"- CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AMERICAN AND FINNISH LIFE STYLE AND SOCIETY

-Some "answers" and opponent arguments to your text materials about "Snow in May" . . . .
CHAPTER 3: Love and to fall in love in the play.
Kari Scott wrote,that the phenomenon "love" in the play was "a monster, an unhappy thing". He [sic] argued, that the play has portrayed women to be "a lower race". Somehow this seems to be true - I think women's position both in the U.S. and in Finland is not as good as it should be. Perhaps the two women (Helena and her daughter Maija) are too satisfied with their lives - although Helena is problemazing it all the time and Maija is too young to take care of herself. "The difference between men and women has been described also so, that a woman IS, a man IS DOING. Feminity is aimed at other people and it is passive, masculinity is aimed at itself and it is active. After Karen Horney a woman is reaching her feminity in sex and in giving birth to children. Masculinity demands, that a man IS DOING something to fulfil himself. After Simone de Beauvoir and Margaret Mead the difference between "to BE" and "to DO" is seen also in industrial life" (Haavio-Mannila, Jallinoja, Strandell, 112). Personally I think, that perhaps the women in the U.S. (in general) seem to be more independent than in Finland, but in reality their position is nearly the same.
CHAPTER 4: Cultural differences between American and Finnish life style and society. First thing, which came into my mind was, that a typical Finnish character differs from American one quite a lot. It is well known, that Finnish people (in general) are introvert, shy, melancholy and they can control their feelings very well. The Finns also love to deliberate different questions. In spite of Americans (as far as I know them!) are open, noisy, always smiling [John Gahimer's allusion in his autobiography].

SOURCE BOOKS:
Haavio-Mannila, Jallinoja, Strandell: Family, work and feelings (1984)

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Excerpt 7:
Mark Gibson: Willy, like Troy Maxon [in Wilson's Fences], lives his life as though it's a chore and so he seeks happiness in the irresponsible and self promoting affair with the receptionist who might help him make a sale. He ignores the little things in life to concentrate on the big prize--elusive success. He becomes an empty man chasing empty dreams--tragic in his pathetic pursuit. This play touches upon many things in my own life. I'm going to school, and everyone is so happy to hear it "What are you going for?" they ask. I'm going for my own satisfaction. My major is creative writing, and it is not exactly a lucrative field unless you're extremely talented. I work two low level jobs (Pizza Hut and a video store) that I enjoy very much. I'm good at most jobs I take on and I love the people I work with. Maybe I'll end up as a college educated pizza cook who spends his life getting rejection slips from publishers, but as long as I have food, shelter, good Friends, and good times, I need be nothing more. I have dreams of wealth, success and world fame/love, but they aren't the ends that justify any means. If I don't become rich and famous,

I'll settle for happiness and still be worth far more alive than dead.

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Excerpt 8
Sat., 3 Mar 90 12:02
From: <AOHEINO@FINFUN>
Subject: Help coming
To: ibgl100@indycms

. . . I have met students who took part in our seminar and they had liked it much: the possibility to discuss in foreign language with people they never met gave them a touch of international working team. And they often talk about you and how nice it was to see you here. The American part of our seminar was not a myth.

When I now think about our project I am quite convinced that I had a little too much to do: teaching the use of computers and word processing, then converting myself the texts in ASCII-code and sending them to you. And backwards the same. The reason was that my students didn't have access to BITNET.

If we do something like that again I would do everything in my power to get my students direct access to BITNET and themselves and to make them discuss directly with your students. And perhaps without papers only via terminals from (Finnish) heart to (American) heart. You and me could or had to before starting discuss about the topics which we then should give to our groups. The size of the group could be from 10-15 but if there are more then two or three could make a working team to contact your students.

To guide the conversations we could use lets say your SEEN or some list of relevant questions. My group here could come together perhaps every second week to tell each other what kind of discussions are going on in BITNET. In between my students could go freely to the terminals and send their greetings and opinions to students in your group. And I would minimalize my role. I would like to be some kind of 'Geist der Erzaehlung', I would be there when needed and keep the process going on. - So, how do you see it? . . .
Our best wishes to you and say hello to the Hoyts!

Aarre